

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 9, 2018

Agenda Item: Reservoir Creek Beaver Transplant

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 minutes

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Background: The Bannack Grazing Association requested beaver be transplanted onto their private property in Reservoir Creek, 26 miles southwest of Dillon. The association seeks the passive and cost-effective restoration and water-storage benefits that beaver can provide. They accept that beaver may create some conflict with irrigation infrastructure. FWP determined that there is suitable habitat on a portion of Reservoir Creek, and there is no conflict with upstream or downstream landowners (USFS and DNRC). The lower end of Reservoir Creek is a losing reach that is dry and does not flow to Grasshopper Creek, making it unlikely that beaver would recolonize the stream. One culvert was identified as being vulnerable to creating flooding issues if plugged by beaver, and a plan to protect it from beaver will be implemented in the short term. The BLM plans to upgrade the culvert and this should alleviate the issue permanently.

Public Involvement Process & Results: An environmental assessment was prepared, and comment was accepted through June 22, 2018. The EA proposed transplanting up to six beavers from adjacent drainages; preparing the site with beaver dam analogues and slash piles to minimize short-term predation risk; and inspection and protection of culverts, if warranted, to ensure roads are not impacted by beaver. Sixty individuals, five organizations and two agencies commented on the proposal. One neighboring landowner was opposed, citing unsuitable habitat and impacts to aspen and westslope cutthroat trout. The balance of comments supports the project. Several comments recommended a temporary or permanent closure to beaver trapping. FWP concurred with one suggestion to move entire family groups to maintain social structure and improve the chances of success. A decision notice recommending we move forward with the proposal was issued by FWP Region 3 on June 27, 2018. The EA and decision notice are included in the commission packet.

Alternatives and Analysis: The alternative is to not transplant beaver into Reservoir Creek. The stream will continue to deliver excess sediment and lack connection to the floodplain as documented by the BLM Dillon Field Office in 2011. A nonprofit organization could engineer structures and modifications to the stream channel to alleviate sediment and reconnect the floodplain, but these alternatives were not considered in the EA. FWP is not insensitive to the issue of a temporary closure to beaver trapping in Reservoir Creek. If a closure is warranted, FWP will pursue it during the next furbearer-season-setting process. Permission to harvest beaver would be required on association property, and Montana DNRC requires a land-use license to trap on its property. FWP believes these provide adequate opportunity to minimize harvest and allow beaver to occupy suitable habitat.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The department recommends final approval of this proposal. The project represents a good opportunity to use beaver as a cost-effective and passive way to achieve habitat benefits for both fish and wildlife in Reservoir Creek.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission approve the transplant of up to six beavers into Reservoir Creek.